DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 508 IR 017 661

AUTHOR	Hagerty, Robert E.
TITLE	The Elements and Principles of Visual Organization.
PUB DATE	[95]
NOTE	6p.; In: Eyes on the Future: Converging Images, Ideas, and Instruction. Selected Readings from the Annual Conference of the International Visual Literacy Association (27th, Chicago, IL, October 18-22, 1995); see IR 017 629.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Geometric Constructions; *Illustrations; *Nonverbal Communication; Organization; *Slides; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS	Line (Visual Arts); Shapes; University of Cincinnati OH; *Visual Communication; *Visual Compositions

ABSTRACT

A slide-lecture, "The Elements of Visual Organization," was developed and presented at four weekend workshops for faculty from all areas of the University of Cincinnati's campus. Twenty-nine computer-generated slides were designed to illustrate the role of visuals as a medium of communication. Some were black and white and others were color; all were based on a single, non-objective composition. The slide presentation was accompanied by oral commentary. Twelve of the images created for the presentation are provided, along with a brief approximation of the spoken commentary which accompanied them. These images include types of lines, shapes, forms, patterns, scale, balance, and movement. (AEF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Alice D. Walker
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

The Elements And Principles Of Visual Organization

by Robert E. Hagerty

ED 391 508

WHAT WE KNOW:

- The role of visuals as a medium of communication becomes increasingly important as use of the computer becomes more universal.
- The majority of people who are using computers have had little or no training in visual studies. They are often unaware of the existence of an organized visual language.
- Miscommunication is often the result of attempts to make oneself understood in what is effectively a foreign language. Even a document that is all text must be visually well organized if it is to communicate effectively.

As a member of the University of Cincinnati's Visual Literacy Committee I developed a slide-lecture, "The Elements of Visual Organization", which I presented at four weekend workshops we held for faculty from all areas of the campus. I consider the slide-lecture to be a type of "primer" on visual literacy. Since most of the faculty participants were from disciplines that do not involve any form of visual studies, they had not been exposed to the terms and concepts which are common to people engaged in visual communications.

Working from a list of the elements and principles of visual organization which was compiled by Dr. Hermine Feinstein, chair of the University's Visual Literacy Committee, I designed a set of twenty-nine slides to illustrate these elements and principles.

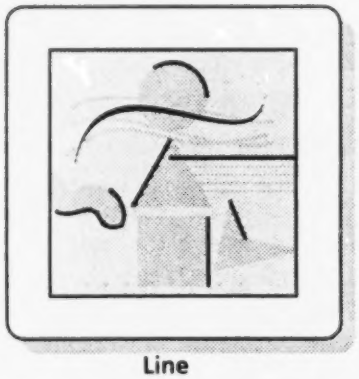
The illustrations are computer generated 2" x 2" slides, all of which are based on a single, non-objective composition. Some are black and white, others are color, depending on the content of the illustration. The presentation was designed to be accompanied by oral commentary, preferably in the form of a dialogue with the audience rather than a standard lecture.

IR017661

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

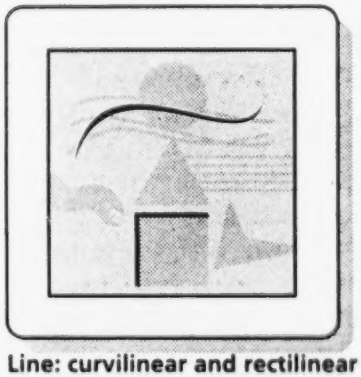
The slides make no direct reference to work on the computer but are applicable to any visual format. It happens, however, that most people now have their first encounter with manipulating visual elements when working on a computer generated document. When I recently presented this slide-lecture to a colleague's class in electronic media, the students seemed to have no trouble seeing how the concepts might apply to their projects. Indeed, they were pleased to learn of the existence of a systematic visual grammar.

I will reproduce here several of the images I created for the presentation along with an brief approximation of the spoken commentary which accompanied them. Having presented this several times, I have learned that there are some important points to discuss aside from the basic information. While many of the associations prompted by the elements and principles are derived from our physical bodies and surroundings and can therefore be considered universal, some are culture-based and cannot. (Reactions to color tend to be especially dependent upon cultural factors. In the west we designate black as the color of mourning. Other cultures use white, gold, or purple to signify the same.) Making this clear can save a lot of confusion and help keep the discussion focused. It is also worthwhile to let the audience know that these elements and principles have been around and agreed upon for a very long time; that this is simply a presentation of a widely accepted visual language.



Line

Line is the path of a moving point in space. Line creates edges and boundaries. It depicts movement.

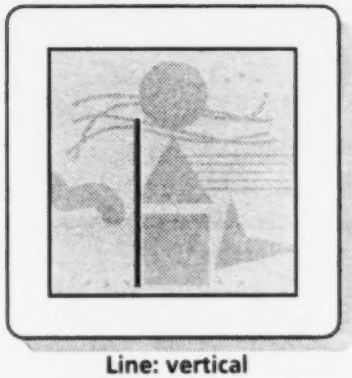


Line: curvilinear and rectilinear

Curvilinear line suggests delicacy and spontenaity while a rectilinear line suggests certainty and directness. What do curvilinear letterforms, such as script typefaces or handwriting, say to you as opposed to what block lettering might indicate?

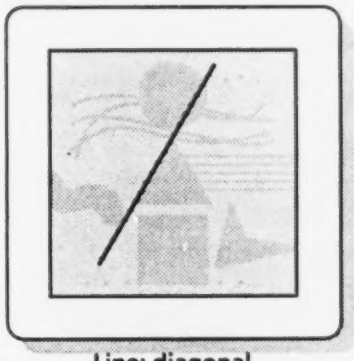
Line: horizontal

Horizontal line suggests rest, quiet, and calm. The human body rests and sleeps in a horizontal position. During a relaxing day at the beach one's field of vision is primarily exposed to the calming aspect of the sea meeting the sky at a horizontal juncture.



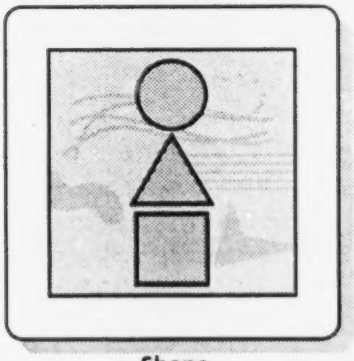
Line: vertical

Vertical line suggests the state of alertness and attention. A soldier standing at attention is in a vertical position. Buildings in a cityscape are vertical, reflecting the necessity of an inhabitant to be alert and aware.



Line: diagonal

Diagonal line suggests movement. If the soldier who was standing at attention begins to run his body takes on a diagonal orientation. A tree falling is a diagonal line. A diagonal roof plane leans against other planes to achieve stability.

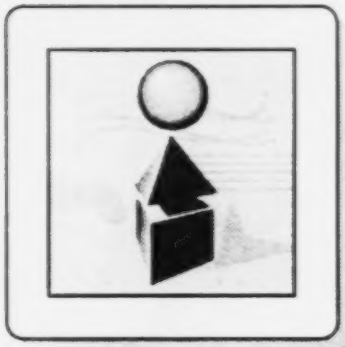


Shape

A line connected to itself produces a shape. A shape is any 2-dimensional form which is bounded by a line, a value, or both. Although infinite in their potential complexity, shapes fall into three basic types: the circle, the triangle, and the square.

Shape: circle

The circle expresses endlessness, warmth and protection: an endlessly revolving wheel, the warmth of the sun, the protection of a wagon train, an encircling embrace.



Form

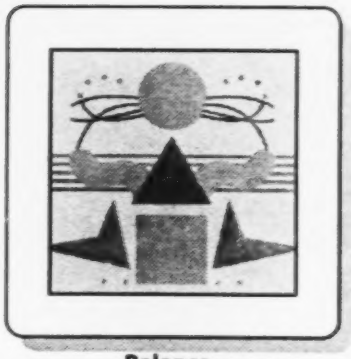
Up to this point we've dealt with simple shapes. While everyday life demands that we confront very complex, three-dimensional form, the human mind will intuitively seek simplicity and the reduction of the more complex forms to elemental shapes will help reveal their meaning.

Pattern

Pattern is a two-dimensional, predictable repetition of basic elements. As our lives, which are made of a pattern of repeating days, a graphic pattern may be seen as dull and monotonous or endlessly fascinating in its richness and subtle variation.

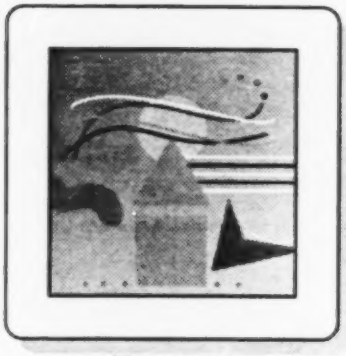
Scale

Scale establishes a relationship of importance in a two-dimensional setting. Here the triangulate shape is clearly dominant to the point. In a three-dimensional setting scale might indicate distance as well as importance. Could it be that the point is larger than the triangulate shape but much farther back in space?



Balance

Balance may be symmetrical, asymmetrical, or radial. The symmetrical composition shown here evokes associations of formality – it moves less and is more "proper" than the others. Equilibrium is easier to achieve with symmetry but the result will never be as exciting.



Movement

In all but the most rigid compositions movement plays a vital role. Here the background moves from dark to light while the shape on the left would be described as undulating. The curved lines flow past the circle which has moved behind the triangle. The horizontal lines move to an alternating light/dark rhythm as the triangulate shape swoops beneath them. The square and triangle hold still in the midst of all this activity.

Although the set here is incomplete I hope these samples have given the flavor of my presentation. In this paper I have, for obvious reasons, excluded the many slides which are dependent on color.

I like to end the slide-lecture by pointing out that although the examples used have been constructed of non-objective shapes, the underlying concepts apply to any pictorial imagery, whether two-dimensional or three. Being aware of the powers in point and line, and shape and value and color; in other words being aware that there is a visual language, enables a viewer to read and understand visual imagery in all its infinite variety.